FANTASTIC EXPLOITS NUMBER 19

Authorized Edition

THERE'LL BE SOME CHANGES MADE!
WE ARE SIXTY-TWO LIGHT YEARS FROM EARTH WHEN IT HAPPENS! THE SHIP SUDDENLY LURCHES, SENDING ME SPRAWLING AGAINST A STEEL-ENCLOSED TURBO-BOOSTER! I GUESS I HIT MY HEAD PRETTY HARD...
HEY!
WHAT THE ..!
OWWW!

FANTASTIC EXPLOITS NO. 19. Published by THE S.F.C.A., 9875 S.W. 212 St., Miami, Fla. 33157. Editor & Publisher = G.B. Love. Asst. Editor = Jim Van Hise. Cover by Andy Warner. All strips contained herein are published with permission and are copyrited by WILLIAM M. GAINES and cannot be reprinted. Price $1.00 per copy ($1.25 if mailed by first class mail.)

WHEN I COME TO...
WHA-WHAT HAPPENED?
THE OVERDRIVE CONKED OUT, COMMANDER MORRISON!
GOOD LORD! WITHOUT THE OVERDRIVE, IT'LL TAKE US SIXTY YEARS TO GET HOME! CAN IT BE FIXED, ELLIS?
NOT UNLESS WE LAND SOMEWHERE, SIR!
HOW FAR ARE WE FROM THE NEAREST SOLAR SYSTEM?
WITHOUT OVERDRIVE, ABOUT TWO MONTHS JOURNEY, COMMANDER, BUT...
BUT WHAT, ELLIS?
IT'S UNEXPLORED, SIR! THE SOLAR SYSTEM, THAT IS! WE HAVE NO GEOLOGICAL OR SOCIOLOGICAL INFO ABOUT THE PLANETS! IT MAY MEAN TROUBLE!
AND THE NEAREST CHARTED SOLAR SYSTEM WHERE WE CAN LAND, ELLIS?
TWO YEARS OFF, AT LEAST, SIR!
PERHAPS YOU FORGET, LIEUTENANT ELLIS! WE WERE SUPPOSED TO HAVE REACHED EARTH BY THE END OF THIS YEAR! WE CANNOT POSSIBLY LAST TWO YEARS! WE HAVEN'T SUFFICIENT OXYGEN OR FOOD FOR IT!
YES, SIR! I'LL GIVE THE ORDER, SIR! WE'LL HEAD FOR THE UNCHARTED ONE!
TWO MONTHS LATER, WE ENTER THE UNCHARTED SOLAR SYSTEM! WE CIRCLE PLANET AFTER PLANET... SIX IN ALL...UNTIL WE FIND A LIKELY-LOOKING ONE TO LET-DOWN ON...
SHE'S GREEN, SIR! CLOUD FORMATIONS, TOO!
GOOD! THEN IT HAS AN ATMOSPHERE! STAND BY! WE'RE GOING IN!

IN NO TIME FLAT WE'RE RESTING QUIETLY ON THE STRANGE NEW PLANET! THE DUST WE KICK UP WHEN WE LAND IS JUST BEGINNING TO SETTLE WHEN I PRESS THE PORT-CONTROL BUTTON...

SAY! LOOK OFF *THERE!* A *SETTLEMENT!* THERE'S *I-LIFE** ON THIS PLANET!

YOU'RE *RIGHT*, SIR!

*I-LIFE: INTELLIGENT FORM OF LIFE!—ED.

I SET OFF WITH LIEUTENANT ELLIS TO INVESTIGATE THE COLONY WHILE THE CREW STARTS WORK ON THE OVERDRIVE! SUDDENLY, AS WE APPROACH...

THERE GO SOME OF THEM, SIR! *HUMANOIDS**, *TOO!* WHY... THEY'RE *RUNNING!*

THEY SEEM TO BE *AFRAID* OF US, ELLIS! THEY'RE RUNNING *AWAY* FROM US...

*HUMANOID: HAVING HUMAN FORM!—ED.

THE SETTLEMENT EMPTIES OUT FAST! THE ALIENS RUN LIKE CRAZY WHEN THEY SPOT US! THEY ALL HEAD FOR A BUNCH OF IGLOO-SHAPED STRUCTURES, AND EACH ALIEN SCRAMBLES INTO ONE...

MUST BE A TYPE OF *BOMB-SHELTER*, EH, ELLIS?

LOOKS THAT WAY, SIR! I BROUGHT MY *A-T UNIT!** SHALL I *TUNE 'EM IN!*

*A-T UNIT: AUTOMATIC-TRANSLATOR UNIT!—ED.

GO AHEAD! I DIDN'T GET MUCH OF A *LOOK* AT THESE CREATURES! I'D *LIKE* TO! I... I *THOUGHT* I SAW *SOMETHING*... ER... SOMETHING...

I DID *TOO*, SIR! *FEMALES!* QUITE *ATTRACTIVE*, TOO! HERE GOES...

ELLIS SWITCHES ON HIS A-T UNIT AND TUNES IT TO 'UNIVERSAL'! THEN HE STARTS TALKING...

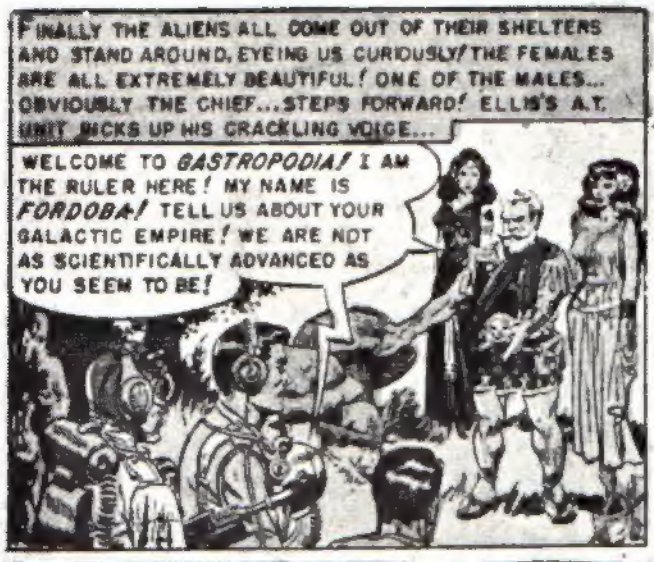
DO NOT BE FRIGHTENED! WE COME IN PEACE! WE MEAN NO HARM! OUR ROCKET-SHIP IS DISABLED AND WE HAVE LANDED HERE TO REPAIR IT!

THE SHY ALIENS POKE THEIR HEADS OUT OF THEIR LITTLE SHELTERS ONE BY ONE AS ELLIS'S MESSAGE IS AUTOMATICALLY TRANSLATED INTO THEIR NATIVE TONGUE...

WE ARE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE WITH ITS HEADQUARTERS ON THE PLANET EARTH!

LITTLE BY LITTLE, THE ALIENS EMERGE FROM THEIR BOMB-SHELTERS AND EDGE TOWARD US...

WE CAN GAIN MUCH BY MUTUAL FRIENDSHIP! MY NAME IS ROBERT ELLIS! THIS IS THE SHIP'S COMMANDER, ARNOLD MORRISON...


FINALLY THE ALIENS ALL COME OUT OF THEIR SHELTERS AND STAND AROUND, EYEING US CURIOUSLY! THE FEMALES ARE ALL EXTREMELY BEAUTIFUL! ONE OF THE MALES... OBVIOUSLY THE CHIEF... STEPS FORWARD! ELLIS'S A.T. UNIT PICKS UP HIS CRACKLING VOICE...
WELCOME TO *GASTROPODIA!* I AM THE RULER HERE! MY NAME IS *FORDOBA!* TELL US ABOUT YOUR GALACTIC EMPIRE! WE ARE NOT AS SCIENTIFICALLY ADVANCED AS YOU SEEM TO BE!

WE SPEND MANY HOURS AFTER THAT GIVING THE ALIENS OF GASTROPODIA A ROUGH IDEA OF EARTH, AND THE OTHER MEMBER-PLANETS OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE! THAT EVENING THE ENTIRE CREW IS ENTERTAINED LAVISHLY...
SOME *FEAST,* EH, COMMANDER?
DON'T BOTHER HIM, ELLIS! HE'S GOT HIS EYE ON THAT *BLONDE* OVER THERE!

FINALLY I GET UP ENOUGH NERVE TO INTRODUCE MYSELF TO THE GOLDEN-HAIRED ALIEN...
MY NAME IS ARNOLD! WHAT IS YOURS?
LUWANA!

YOU ARE VERY *BEAUTIFUL,* LUWANA! ARE YOU... ER... *MARRIED?*
MARRIED? WHAT IS *THAT?*

DO YOU HAVE A *HUSBAND...* A *MATE?*
OH, *NO!* I AM *NOT MATED YET!*

I GUESS I FALL IN LOVE WITH LUWANA ALMOST IMMEDIATELY! ANYWAY, BY THE TIME THE SHIP IS REPAIRED, I MAKE UP MY MIND...
YOU'RE *CRAZY,* COMMANDER! STAY *HERE...* ON *THIS* PRIMITIVE PLANET?
I'M IN *LOVE* WITH HER, ELLIS! SHE'S CONSENTED TO BE MY *WIFE!*

THEN BRING HER *BACK* WITH YOU! DON'T STAY *HERE,* SIR!
I'M *TIRED,* ELLIS! I'VE BEEN HOPPING AROUND THE GALAXY FOR *SIX YEARS* NOW! I WANT TO SETTLE DOWN! *THIS* PLACE LOOKS GOOD TO *ME!*

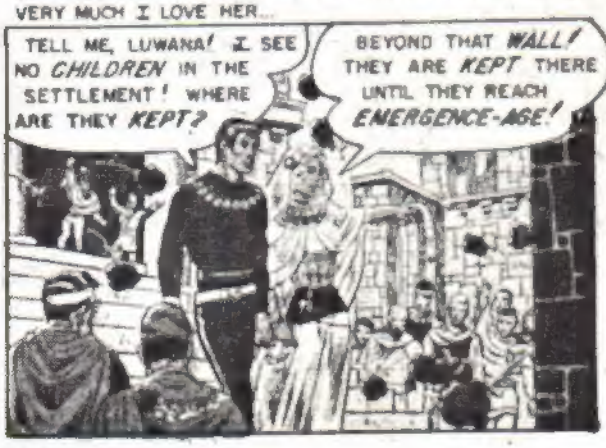
OKAY, COMMANDER! IT'S YOUR FUNERAL! THE BOYS AT G.E.* HEADQUARTERS WON'T LIKE IT! THEY'LL BUST YOU, SURE!
I'M NOT GIVING THEM THE CHANCE! HERE! MY RESIGNATION PAPERS! YOU'RE IN CHARGE NOW!
*G.E.: GALACTIC EMPIRE! -ED.

I... I'VE GOT TO HAND IT TO YOU, SIR! YOU'VE GOT NERVE! MAYBE... MAYBE I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN SOMEDAY... WHEN G.E. DECIDES TO TAKE GASTROPODIA INTO THE FOLD!
PERHAPS, ELLIS! IN ANY CASE, GOOD LUCK ON YOUR TRIP BACK!

I WATCH MY SHIP BLAST OFF FROM MY NEW-FOUND-HOME...
S'LONG, YOU GUYS!

...AND AS THE ROCKET-TRAIL DISAPPEARS INTO THE BLUE ABOVE, LUWANA IS AT MY SIDE...
IT IS TIME, ARNOLD! COME!

...AND I KNOW I HAVE MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE...
DEAREST...
FORODBA AWAITS US! HE WILL... AS YOU SAY... MARRY US!


SO, LUWANA AND I ARE 'MARRIED'! THE CEREMONY IS A LITTLE PRIMITIVE, BUT I DON'T MIND MUCH! I THINK OF LUWANA... HOW BEAUTIFUL SHE IS... AND HOW VERY MUCH I LOVE HER...
TELL ME, LUWANA! I SEE NO CHILDREN IN THE SETTLEMENT! WHERE ARE THEY KEPT?
BEYOND THAT WALL! THEY ARE KEPT THERE UNTIL THEY REACH EMERGENCE-AGE!

YOU MEAN THE MOTHER DOES NOT BRING UP THE CHILD?
OF COURSE NOT! WE HAVE COMPETENT SPECIALISTS FOR THAT PURPOSE! THE MOTHER GOES THERE TO HAVE HER OFF-SPRING, AND THEN LEAVES IT!

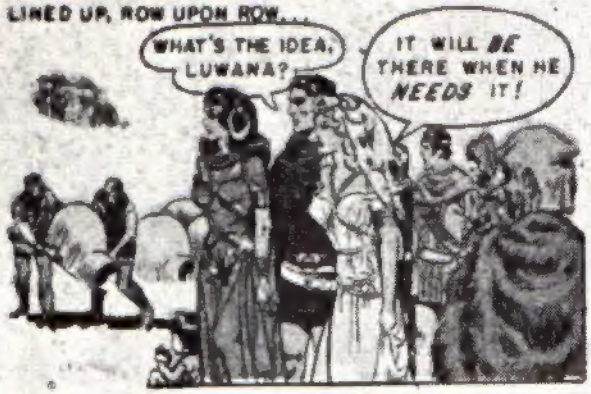
BUT WHAT ABOUT *MATERNAL LOVE*? ON EARTH, WE FEEL IT IS VERY NECESSARY FOR A CHILD'S SECURITY!
MOTHER LOVE! *BAH!* HOW LONG CAN IT LAST?

I AM FLABBERGASTED AT LUWANA'S COLDNESS TOWARD THE CHILDREN OF MY NEW SOCIETY! I WONDER WHAT I CAN DO ABOUT CHANGING THINGS, WHEN...

THE GATE IN THE WALL... BEYOND WHICH THE CHILDREN ARE KEPT... OPENS, AND ONE OF THOSE IGLOO-LIKE BOMB-SHELTERS IS PUSHED OUT...

OTHERS OF THE COLONY GATHER AROUND THE STRUCTURE... TRYING TO COAX THE YOUNGSTER FROM HIS HIDING PLACE! FINALLY HIS WIDE EYED LITTLE FACE APPEARS...

FINALLY, THE YOUNGSTER CRAWLS FROM THE IGLOO-THING! THE GATHERING CHEERS! THE BOY SMILES SHYLY! THEN HIS SHELTER IS LIFTED ALOFT AND CARRIED TO THE SPOT WHERE THE OTHERS ARE LINED UP, ROW UPON ROW...



SUDDENLY, LUWANA LOOKS AT ME... SHOCKED...

BUT I GET MY IGLOO ANYWAY! LUWANA INSISTS! USUALLY THEY *DESTROY* THEM WHEN THEIR OWNER *KICKS OFF*, BUT *ONE* THEY *SAVE*... FOR *ME*...

IT'S ABOUT SIX MONTHS LATER THAT THE STRANGE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS BEGINS! AT FIRST I DON'T THINK ANYTHING OF IT WHEN LUWANA CUTS HER LONG GOLDEN HAIR SHORT...
LUWANA! YOUR HAIR! WHAT DID YOU DO TO YOUR HAIR?
I CUT IT! IT IS TIME!
..OR WHEN SHE BEGINS TO LOSE HER EXOTIC FIGURE...
YOU'RE LOSING WEIGHT, DEAR! IS ANYTHING WRONG?
OF COURSE NOT, ARNOLD! IT IS AS IT SHOULD BE!
BUT WHEN HER FACE BEGINS TO CHANGE SLIGHTLY, I QUESTION HER...
LUWANA? ARE WE... I MEAN... ARE YOU...
HAVE A CHILD? NO, ARNOLD! IT IS TOO LATE!
AND I AM EVEN MORE CONFUSED WHEN LUWANA BEGINS TO SHUN MY ADVANCES...
BUT...BABY! DON'T YOU... LOVE ME ANY MORE?
OF COURSE I DO, DARLING! BUT... YOU MUST WAIT NOW...
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT'S COME OVER LUWANA! I AM COMPLETELY SPURNED! AT NIGHT, I GO WALKING...
GOT NOTHING ELSE TO DO! GUESS I'LL LOOK OVER MY IGLOO!
THE ROWS OF BOMB-SHELTER, IGLOO-SHAPED STRUCTURES GLEAM IN THE LIGHT FROM THE PLANET'S TWO MOONS! I CRAWL INSIDE MINE...
WONDER WHAT THEY MAKE THESE THINGS OF! HMMM! SEEMS TO BE A SORT OF... OF...GOOD LORD!
SUDDENLY IT HITS ME...THE WHOLE CRAZY PICTURE! FROM BEYOND THE WALL, I HEAR AN INFANT'S PITIFUL WAILING...
I'VE GOT TO BE SURE! I'VE GOT TO!
WAAAA
7

I SCALE THE WALL EASILY...

...AND DART INTO THE NURSERY-BUILDING...

A LOOK INTO ONE DORMITORY IS ENOUGH! THEY'RE THERE...THE YOUNG ONES...JUST LIKE I EXPECTED THEM TO BE! THEY STARE AT ME...POKING THEIR HEADS OUT OF THEIR SHELLS...

SNAILS! THAT'S WHAT THEY ARE! SNAILS!

I STUMBLE FROM THE NURSERY-BUILDING...

I SHOULD HAVE *REALIZED!* I SHOULD HAVE *KNOWN!* THOSE *IGLOO-THINGS* ARE THE ALIEN'S *SHELLS!* THEY'RE *BORN* WITH THEM, BUT EVENTUALLY *EMERGE* FROM THEM WHEN THEY'RE *FULLY DEVELOPED!* THEY USE THEM ONLY FOR *PROTECTION* AFTER THAT!

...AND WANDERED AIMLESSLY TOWARD MY HOME...

THAT...THAT EXPLAINS WHY *LUWANA* HAS BEEN ACTING *STRANGELY* LATELY! THESE PEOPLE ARE LIKE THE VARIETY OF SNAILS BACK ON EARTH THAT ARE *HERMAPHRODITIC!* *THEY CHANGE SEX!* THE *MALE* CHANGES TO A *FEMALE*, AND...GULP...*VICE VERSA*...

WHEN I GET HOME, I TIP-TOE INTO LUWANA'S BEDROOM AND LIGHT THE LIGHT! I STARE AT THE HEAVY STUBBLE GROWING OUT OF HIS CHEEKS...THE BROADENED SHOULDERS...THE FLAT CHEST!

HO...HUM! *ARNOLD?* IS IT *YOU?*

LUWANA LOOKS AT ME WITH SLEEPY EYES! EVEN THOSE LONG EYELASHES HAVE SHED! HIS GLANCE DROPS...THEN HE SHRUGS...

ARNOLD, BABY! I WISH *YOU'D* HURRY UP AND *CHANGE*...SO THAT THINGS CAN BE *NORMAL* AGAIN!

THE END

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
by
THE SHIP CAME OUT OF THE BLACK NIGHT SPITTING FIRE... AND GROCK KNEW AN EAGERNESS ALMOST UNBEARABLE IN ITS INTENSITY. THE PLANET RUSTLED AND WAITED. IT HAD WAITED SO LONG. BUT NOW THE WAITING WAS OVER. THEY WERE RETURNING! THEY RODE WITHIN THE ALLOY BOWELS OF THE ROCKET. THEY WERE COMING BACK, AT LAST! MEN!
THE ROCKET SPEWED FLAME, SETTLED. IN HIS EAGERNESS, GROCK SENT HIS MIND QUESTING THROUGH ITS METAL. YES! THE MEN WERE THERE...
WHEW! I'VE BEEN ALL KINDS, CAPTAIN, BUT OLD MOTHER NATURE REALLY OUTDID HERSELF HERE!
STRANGE PLANET, STRANGE LIFE FORMS. YOU'RE A BIOLOGIST, MASON! YOU KNOW THAT?
1

IT'S BEEN FIFTY THOUSAND YEARS SINCE EARTH'S ECOLOGICAL TEAMS SEEDED THIS PLANET. PLENTY OF TIME FOR STIMULATED MUTATION. HOW LONG DO YOU THINK OUR JOB WILL TAKE?
A FEW DAYS. I DON'T THINK IT WILL TAKE LONGER THAN THAT TO DETERMINE IF THE PLANET IS READY FOR COLONIZATION. BUT FROM WHAT I CAN SEE, I HAVE MY DOUBTS
PERSONALLY, I'VE GOT A HUNCH THIS PLACE IS GOING TO BE A BUST AS FAR AS COLONISTS ARE CONCERNED
THAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. EARTH NEEDS COLONIES. THAT'S WHY THE WASTE PLANETS WERE SEEDED. THE NEED WAS ANTICIPATED. SO LET'S HOPE YOU'RE WRONG, MASON. I'M TURNING IN.
GROCK PROBED... AND THEN THERE WAS NOTHING. THE MEN SLEPT. BUT GROCK HAD HEARD COLONISTS! THE THOUGHT WAS WARM, SWEET. MEN MUST COME! THEY MUST! ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT, HE SAVORED THE DREAM...
IT HAD BEEN SO LONG, YET GROCK COULD REMEMBER. THE RACIAL MEMORIES LINGERED. DIMLY, HE COULD RECALL THE LEGENDS WHICH TOLD HOW ONCE THIS PLANET HAD BEEN DEAD, STERILE...
THEN THE SHIP HAD COME. THE OTHER SHIP... LONG AGO. IT HAD LEFT BEHIND A GIFT OF SPORES AND SEEDS AND CHEMICALS. THE SHIP HAD LEFT BEHIND THE GIFT OF LIFE...

THE SHIP HAD COME AND GONE. AND LIFE HAD TAKEN HOLD... ON THIS DEAD, STERILE PLANET..

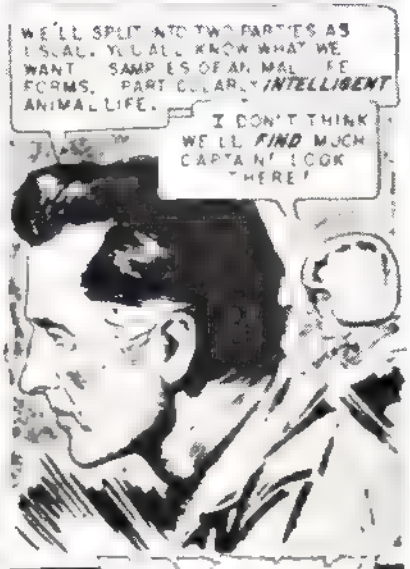
SLOWLY AT FIRST... A TINY SHOOT... A MICROSCOPIC ANIMAL. THEN, AS TIME CREPT BY...

YES, MAN HAD BROUGHT LIFE, AND MAN'S SCIENCE HAD IMPREGNATED THAT LIFE SO THAT IT CHANGED, EVOLVED... SWIFTLY

FOR HALF A THOUSAND CENTURIES THE PLANET HAD FLOWERED... AND WAITED. AND NOW, MAN HAD RETURNED.

WE'LL SPLIT INTO TWO PARTIES AS EQUAL. YOU ALL KNOW WHAT WE WANT... SAMPLES OF ANIMAL LIFE FORMS, PARTICULARLY *INTELLIGENT* ANIMAL LIFE.

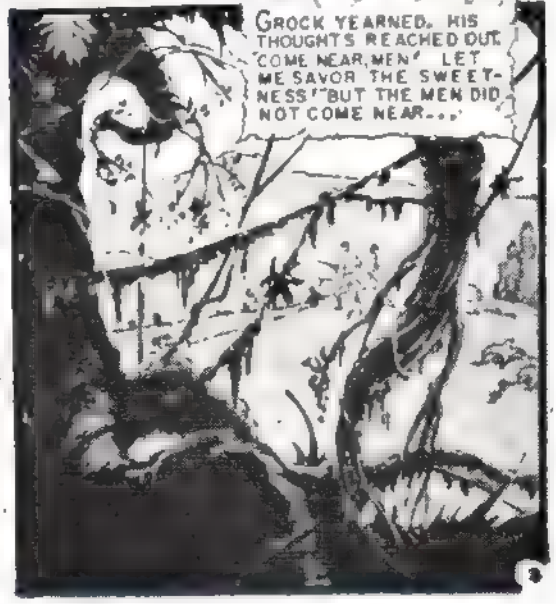
I DON'T THINK WE'LL *FIND* MUCH CAPTAIN! LOOK THERE!



THOSE BONES PROVE THAT THERE ARE *MEAT EATERS* HERE AND *NONE* OF THE INTELLIGENT RACES EAT MEAT ANY LONGER... NOT EVEN *MAN!*

STILL... MAN *DID* EAT MEAT ONCE, MASON! AND MAN *WAS* INTELLIGENT! SO WHO KNOWS? LET'S GO!

GROCK YEARNED. HIS THOUGHTS REACHED OUT. 'COME NEAR, MEN! LET ME SAVOR THE SWEETNESS!' BUT THE MEN DID NOT COME NEAR...'



THE MEN DID NOT COME NEAR, AND GROCK TREMBLED WITH DISAPPOINTMENT. ALL HIS THOUGHTS WERE OF THEM IN THE LONG DAYS AFTER...

IT WAS GOOD TO HAVE THEM NEAR AGAIN AT LAST. ON THE THIRD DAY THEY RETURNED. BUT GROCK DID NOT UNDERSTAND...

WELL, THAT FINISHES THE RUN-DOWN, CAPTAIN. AND THE TOTAL RESULT IS... *NOTHING!* NONE OF THESE THINGS IN THE CAGES SHOWS EVEN A GLIMMERING OF REASON!

AND FROM OUR SURVEY, WE KNOW THAT CONDITIONS ARE EXACTLY SIMILAR *ALL OVER* THIS PLANET. I WAS RIGHT! MAN COULD *NEVER* THRIVE HERE!

NO, I SUPPOSE NOT! UNDER STIMULATED MUTATION THESE ANIMALS HAVE COVERED A MILLION YEARS OF EVOLUTION IN FIFTY THOUSAND. AND YET... *NOTHING!*

EXACTLY! SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, THE EVOLUTION TOOK A WRONG TURNING. YOU *SAW* THE FOREST! NO FRUITS, NO NUTS! EVEN THE *ANIMALS* SEEM TO AVOID IT!

I NOTICED THAT. THEY'RE ONLY SEEN IN THE *OPEN*. YET THE *BONES* PROVE THAT THEY ENTERED THE FOREST *ONCE!*

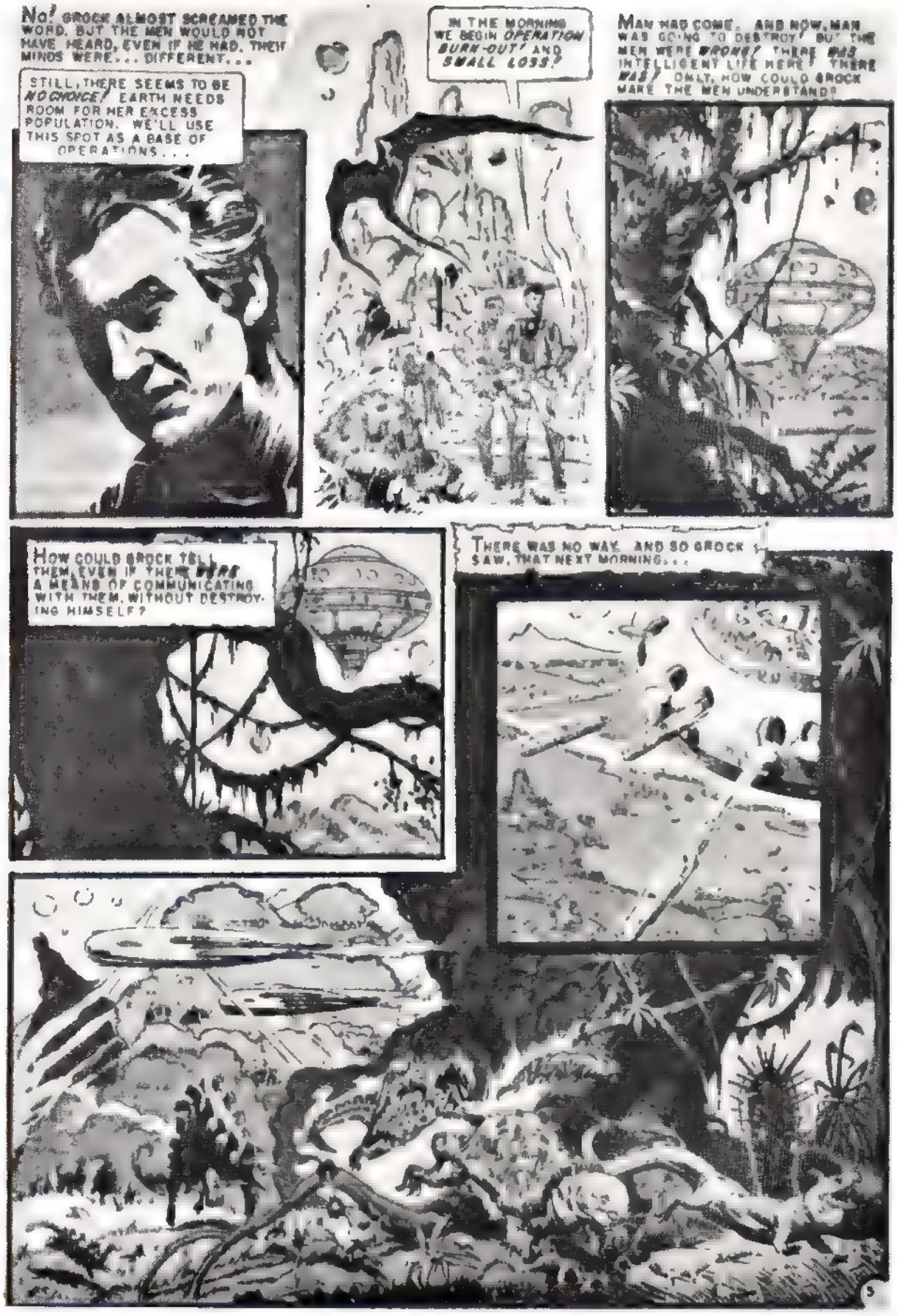
THAT MIGHT BE A *CLUE!* ANY THEORIES, SWANSON? THIS IS IN YOUR LINE. WHY WOULD ANIMALS LEARN TO *AVOID* THE FORESTS? NOXIOUS SOIL? RADIATION?

SORRY, CAPTAIN. THE SOIL *IS GOOD* AND THERE IS *NO RADIATION!* ALL I CAN SAY IS THAT IF *ANIMALS* CAN EVOLVE INTO THINGS LIKE THESE HERE... THE SAME THING COULD HAPPEN TO *MAN!*

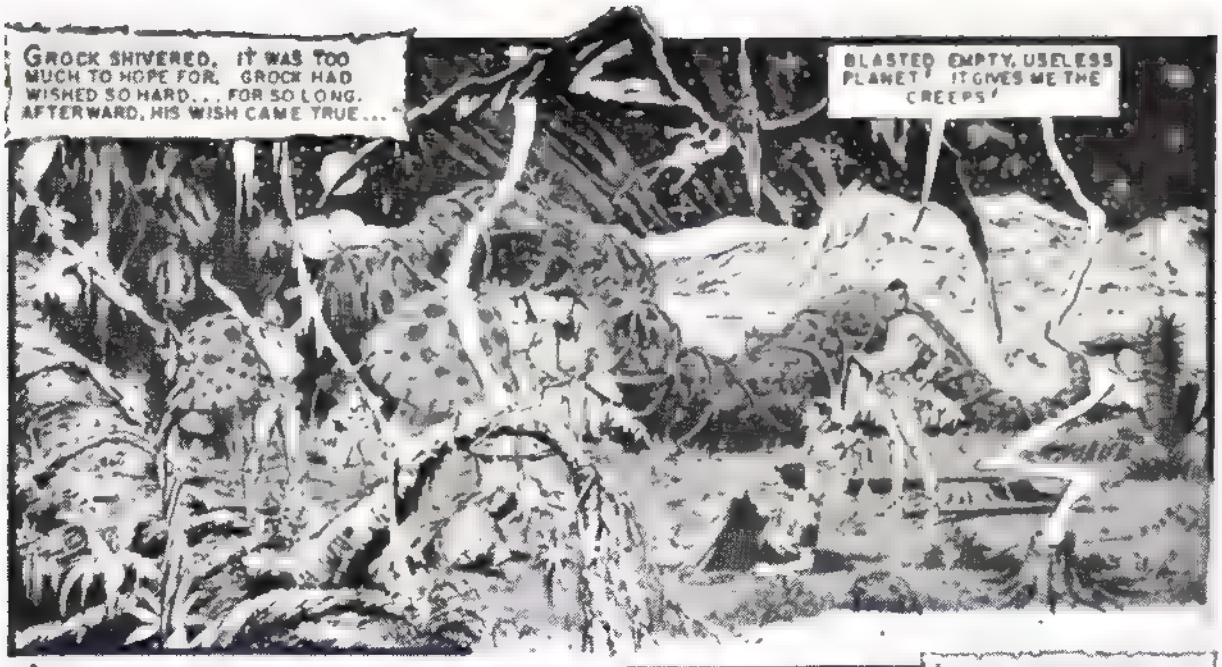
IN OTHER WORDS, WE'RE STUMPED!

STUMPED! IT WOULD BE *CRIMINAL* TO BRING COLONISTS HERE! *LOOK* AT THE PLACE! THE ONLY WAY IT WILL EVER BE *FIT* FOR COLONIZATION IS IF IT'S BURNED CLEAN AND WE *START ALL OVER AGAIN!*

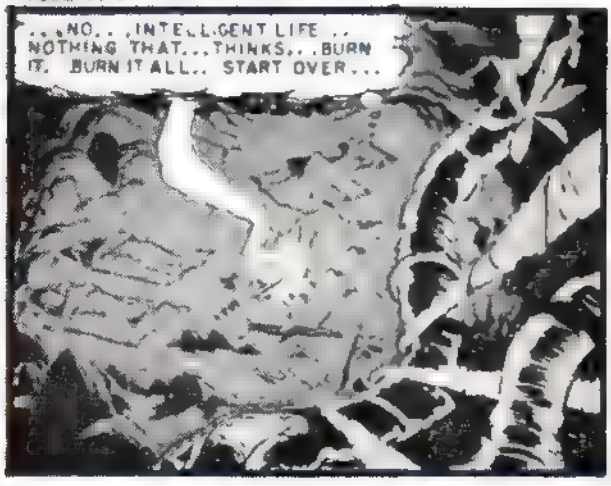
I'M AFRAID THAT'S *JUST* WHAT WE'LL HAVE TO *DO*, MASON! FIFTY THOUSAND YEARS ...*WASTED!* WHAT A PITY!

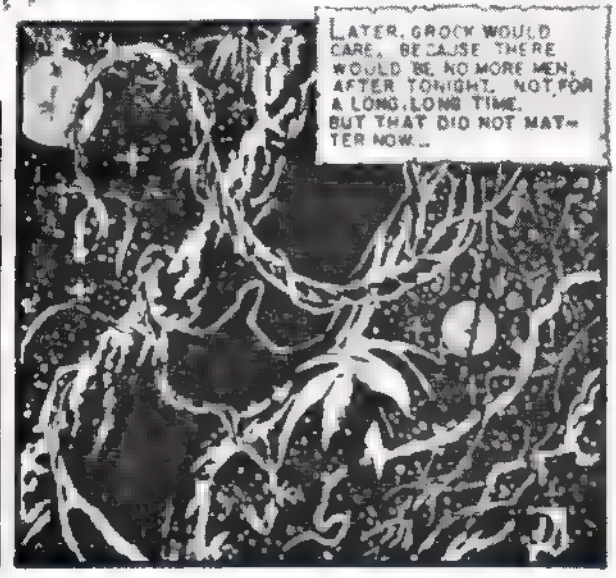

No! GROCK ALMOST SCREAMED THE WORD. BUT THE MEN WOULD NOT HAVE HEARD, EVEN IF HE HAD. THEIR MINDS WERE... DIFFERENT...
STILL, THERE SEEMS TO BE NO CHOICE! EARTH NEEDS ROOM FOR HER EXCESS POPULATION. WE'LL USE THIS SPOT AS A BASE OF OPERATIONS...
IN THE MORNING WE BEGIN OPERATION BURN-OUT AND SMALL LOSS!
MAN HAD COME... AND NOW, MAN WAS GOING TO DESTROY! BUT THE MEN WERE WRONG! THERE WAS INTELLIGENT LIFE HERE! THERE WAS! ONLY, HOW COULD GROCK MAKE THE MEN UNDERSTAND?
HOW COULD GROCK TELL THEM, EVEN IF THERE WERE A MEANS OF COMMUNICATING WITH THEM, WITHOUT DESTROYING HIMSELF?
THERE WAS NO WAY. AND SO GROCK SAW, THAT NEXT MORNING...

GROCK SAW THE LANCES OF FLAME, THE FIRES FLICKERED AND LEAPED AND DIED, AND BEHIND, THE FIRES LEFT BARE ROCK, BARRENNESS...
DAY BY DAY, MILE BY MILE, THE PLANET DIED, AND GROCK COULD ONLY WATCH. GROCK COULD ONLY WAIT AND HOPE...
GROCK WAITED... AND YEARNED, AND THE FLAMING DEATH MOVED CLOSER. BUT IN THE END, THE WAITING WAS NOT IN VAIN...
WELL, I GUESS WE'RE ABOUT THROUGH, AREN'T WE, SIR?
JUST ABOUT! WE'LL BURN OUT THIS LAST PATCH TOMORROW, THEN WE'LL RE-SEED, AND I CAN'T SAY I'M SORRY!
WEIRD, ISN'T IT?
WEIRD... AND DISTURBING SOMEHOW. I ALMOST FEEL AS IF THE PLANET KNOWS IT'S BEING KILLED..
EVERY NOW AND THEN, I GET A.. WELL, CALL IT AN EMOTION! IT'S AS IF SOMETHING... SOMEONE... WERE REACHING INTO MY MIND...
ON THIS PLANET, MASON?
IF YOU'RE SUGGESTING THAT THERE IS AN INTELLIGENCE HERE WHICH WE'VE OVERLOOKED, JUST TAKE A LOOK AROUND YOU! SPIKED PLANTS, A FEW SKELETONS. THAT'S ALL THIS PLACE HAS MANAGED TO PRODUCE!
YOU NEED A CHANGE, MASON! WE ALL DO! WHY DON'T WE SLEEP OUT IN THE OPEN TONIGHT? MAYBE THE FRESH AIR WILL WASH THE BOGEYS OUT OF OUR MINDS.


GROCK SHIVERED. IT WAS TOO MUCH TO HOPE FOR. GROCK HAD WISHED SO HARD... FOR SO LONG. AFTERWARD, HIS WISH CAME TRUE...
BLASTED EMPTY, USELESS PLANET! IT GIVES ME THE CREEPS!

AFTERWARD, GROCK COULD HEAR THE WORDS AND NOT CARE. HE COULD FORGET THE FLAMES AND THE BURNING, EVEN WHEN THE CAPTAIN HIMSELF MUTTERED IN HIS SLEEP...




LATER, GROCK WOULD CARE. BECAUSE THERE WOULD BE NO MORE MEN, AFTER TONIGHT. NOT FOR A LONG, LONG TIME. BUT THAT DID NOT MATTER NOW...

FOR NOW, GROCK LET HIS CREEPERS DOWN... GENTLY...

MAN HAD RETURNED, AT LAST. AND GROCK WAS CONTENT. IT HAD BEEN SO LONG SINCE ANY ANIMAL HAD VENTURED NEAR HIM...

THE MEN STRUGGLED.. CALLED OUT. FROM THE SHIP, A SLEEPY VOICE ANSWERED. A FIGURE APPEARED IN THE DOOR, WEAPON IN HAND.

GROCK SHUDDERED, DROPPING THE MEN, AS THE STREAM OF DESTRUCTIVE ENERGY FROM NOAD'S WEAPON DISINTEGRATED HIS TRUNK ..HIS FEEDER-ROOTS..

GROCK'S SAP RAN. HIS VINES DROOPED, STRING-LIKE HIS LEAVES CURLED. AND DARKNESS BEGAN TO NUMB HIS PERCEPTIVE SENSES. VAGUELY, HE COULD HEAR THE MEN.. SENSE THEIR VOICES, FADING ..

THERE WAS YOUR INTELLIGENT LIFE, CAPTAIN! THAT TREE!
INTELLIGENT? HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT, MASON? IS A "VENUS FLY-TRAP" INTELLIGENT? CAN IT THINK? CAN IT FEEL? CAN IT REASON?

GROCK WITHERED. HIS SENSES REELED. THEIR VOICES WERE ONLY WHISPERS NOW...

GROCK DIED. HIS LEAVES DROPPED LIKE PAPER BITS, TORN BY CHILDREN AND TOSSED TO THE WIND. CHILDREN WHO COULD NOT UNDERSTAND, BECAUSE IT WAS BEYOND THEIR LIMITED IMAGINATIONS...

ALL RIGHT! LET'S GET GOING! IT'S ALMOST DAWN, ANYWAY! BURN OUT THAT LAST PATCH, INCLUDING MASON'S INTELLIGENT TREE! WE'VE GOT TO BE ON OUR WAY!

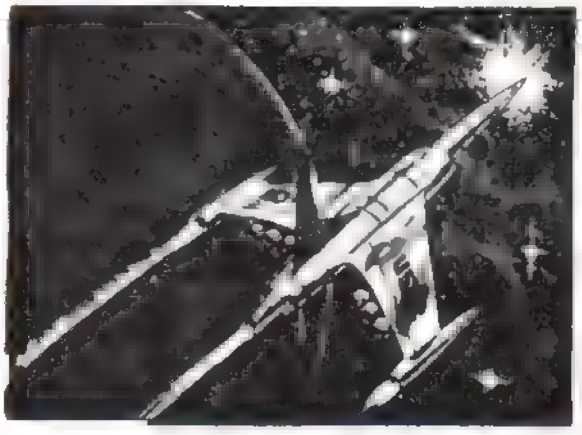
LATER, THE SHIP ROSE INTO THE MORNING LIGHT BEHIND IT, THE PLANET LAY BLACK AND SCORCHED AND STERILE. THE CAPTAIN TURNED TO MASON...

IF THAT TREE WAS SO INTELLIGENT, MASON, WHY COULDN'T IT COMMUNICATE WITH US?
PERHAPS IT TRIED, CAPTAIN! PERHAPS WE WEREN'T INTELLIGENT ENOUGH TO HEAR IT!

NEW WORLD

THIS IS MY WORLD. THIS IS THE WORLD I LOVE. IT IS A STEAMING TROPICAL SWAMP, DAMP AND STINKING AND ALIVE WITH SCREAMING BIRDS AND SLITHERING LIZARDS AND HUMMING INSECTS AND GIANT DINOSAURS THAT SPLASH THROUGH ITS STAGNANT POOLS AND SLOSH THROUGH ITS SUCKING BOGS IN SEARCH OF FOOD TO FILL THEIR CAVERNOUS BELLIES.

IT IS AN ANGRY ROCKET SHIP, LEAPING UPWARD AT THE STARS. SPITTING FLAME AND SMOKE AND ROARING SO LOUD IT SEEMS TO SHAKE DOWN THE VERY HEAVENS IT IS ATTEMPTING TO CONQUER.



IT IS A GLEAMING CITY, RISING FROM THE ROLLING COUNTRYSIDE AND REACHING TOWARD THE SUN, EMBRACING WITHIN ITS GLASS-WALLED BUILDINGS ITS DWELLERS, WHO COME AND GO IN SHINING BEETLE-CARS OR HUMMING AERO-CABS OR STAND CONTENTEDLY ON SLOWLY MOVING SIDEWALKS...

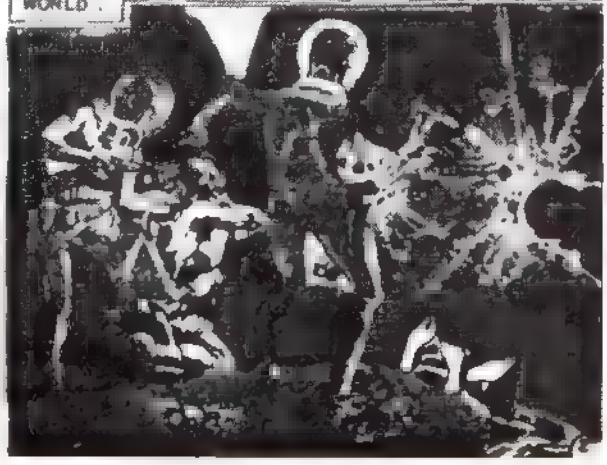
THIS IS MY WORLD. IT IS A WORLD OF GRIM-FACED MEN SITTING BEFORE BATTERIES OF GAUGES AND DIALS AND LEVERS AND BUTTONS, GUIDING THEIR METAL MONSTER ACROSS A HAIRSBREADTH OF THE VAST BLACK GULF OF UNENDING SPACE...

THIS IS THE WORLD I LOVE. IT IS THE MOMENT WHEN THE ROCKET-SHIP BREAKS FREE OF EARTH'S GRAVITY AND STREAKS THROUGH THE VOID IN FREE FALL... WHEN ITS CREWMEN ARE SUDDENLY WEIGHTLESS AND FLOAT LIKE CHILDREN'S BALLOONS AT THE CIRCUS.

IT IS A WORLD OF EXPLORATION INTO THE UNKNOWN. THE SUDDEN THRILL OF GAZING UPON AN ALIEN LANDSCAPE THAT NO HUMAN BEING HAS EVER GAZED UPON BEFORE...

...THE SUDDEN VIOLENT ATTACK OF SHRIEKING ALIEN MONSTERS...

...THE MONSTERS' EQUALLY SUDDEN DESTRUCTION... BLASTED TO SMITHEREENS BY POWERFUL WEAPONS OF MY WORLD.



THE OTHER ALIEN CREATURES HARMLESS...CURIOUS CUTE

THE RUINS OF A ONCE PROUD CITY...NOW FALLING TO DUST. BUILT BY AN ANCIENT CIVILIZATION, WHOSE MEMBERS, TOO, HAVE LONG SINCE FALLEN TO DUST.

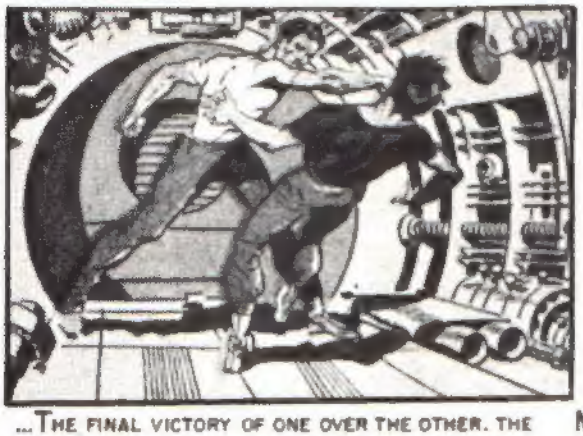
THE SUCKING SULPING MOUNTAIN OF SHIMMERING PROTOPLASMIC LIFE, SLITHERING FROM ONE OF THE RUINED BUILDINGS.

. ABSORBING ALL ORGANIC MATERIAL IN ITS PATH..ENGULFING TOM OR DICK OR HARRY WHILE I LISTEN TO HIS BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAMS ON MY INTERCOM...

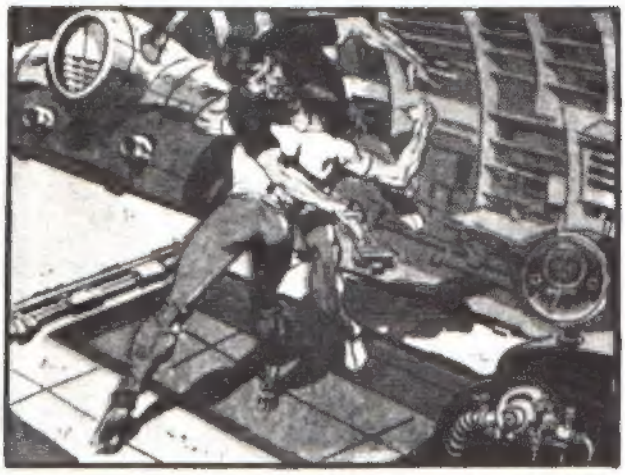
THIS IS MY WORLD. IT IS A WORLD OF LONELY WOMEN WHO TURN THEIR EYES TO THE HEAVENS AND WATCH FOR THE MOVING FLAME AMONG THE STARS THAT SIGNIFIES THE RETURN OF THEIR SPACE-MEN...

... AND THE MEN WHO NEVER COME BACK. THE MEN WHO ARE FLUNG INTO THE VOID BY THE VIOLENT EXPLOSION OF THEIR HOMEWARD-BOUND ROCKET

MY WORLD IS A WORLD OF VIOLENT EMOTION...OF ANGER AND HATE BUILDING UP THROUGH THE DRAGGING MONTHS OF TRAVELING THROUGH SPACE. THE SUDDEN FLARE-UP...THE VOLCANIC ERUPTION OF SUPPRESSED ENERGY...



...THE STRUGGLE OF MUSCLE PITTED AGAINST MUSCLE... BONE AGAINST BONE...SINEW AND TENDON...



...THE FINAL VICTORY OF ONE OVER THE OTHER. THE SICKENING THUD OF THE METAL WRENCH CRUSHING SKULL...SPATTERING BRAINS...SPILLING BLOOD...

MY WORLD IS A WORLD WHERE BEAUTIFUL ALIEN CREATURES SIT BESIDE A STILL POOL AND CARESS A WEARY SPACE-MAN, STROKING HIS HAIR AND KISSING HIS CHEEKS AND MAKING HIM FORGET ABOUT EARTH AND EVER RETURNING...

MY WORLD IS A WORLD WHERE ATOMIC WARS RAGE...

...WHERE WHOLE CITIES ARE LEVELED BY ONE MISSIVE OF DESTRUCTION, WHERE A BABY SITS AMONG THE RUINS, COVERED WITH RADIATION BURNS, CRYING FOR MY WORLD...

MY WORLD CAN BE A WORLD OF DESOLATION... WITHOUT LIFE... WITHOUT HOPE...

...OR IT CAN BE A WORLD OF EVERLASTING PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING AND THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN...

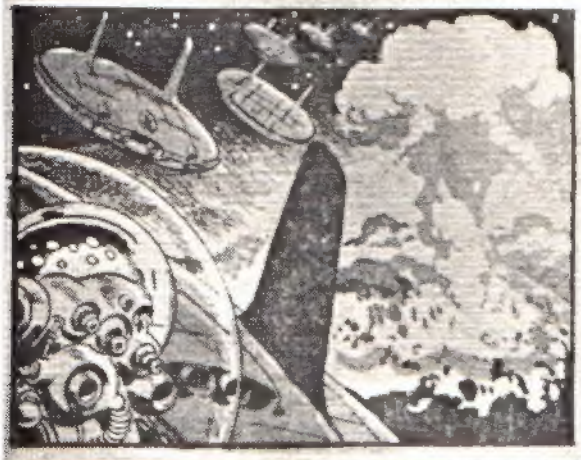
MY WORLD CAN BE A WORLD OF SPACE-STATIONS...

...OF ROCKET TRANSPORTS THAT LEAP ACROSS CONTINENTS IN MINUTES...

...OF ATOMIC-POWERED LINERS THAT SPAN GREAT OCEANS WITH THE ENERGY DERIVED FROM A SINGLE LUMP OF COAL...

...OF GREAT SPACE-SHIPS THAT CARRY TOURISTS ON BRIEF HOLIDAYS TO VENUS OR MARS OR SATURN...

...OR MY WORLD CAN BE UGLY. IT CAN BE A WORLD OF INVASIONS FROM OUTER SPACE BY HORRIBLE ... INTELLIGENT ALIENS BENT ON CONQUERING MY WORLD... COMING ACROSS SPACE IN FLEETS OF FLYING SAUCERS...



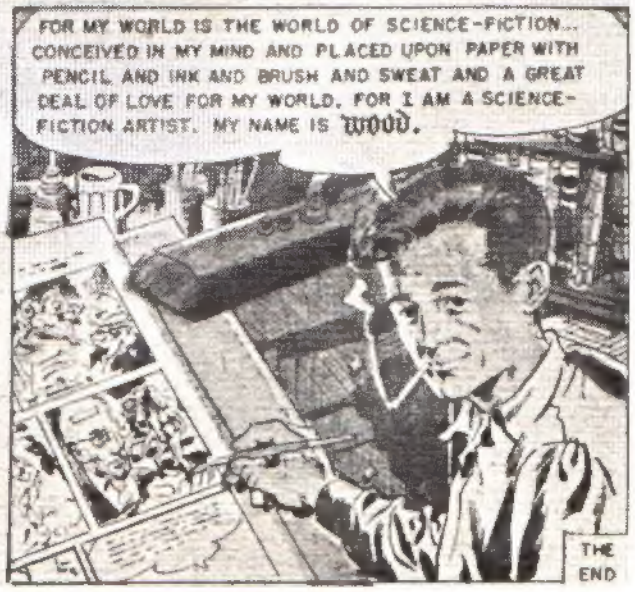
...LANDING AT NIGHT AND ENTERING MY CITIES AND KILL-ING AND MAIMING AND DESTROYING...

MY WORLD IS WHAT I CHOOSE TO MAKE IT, MY WORLD IS YESTERDAY...

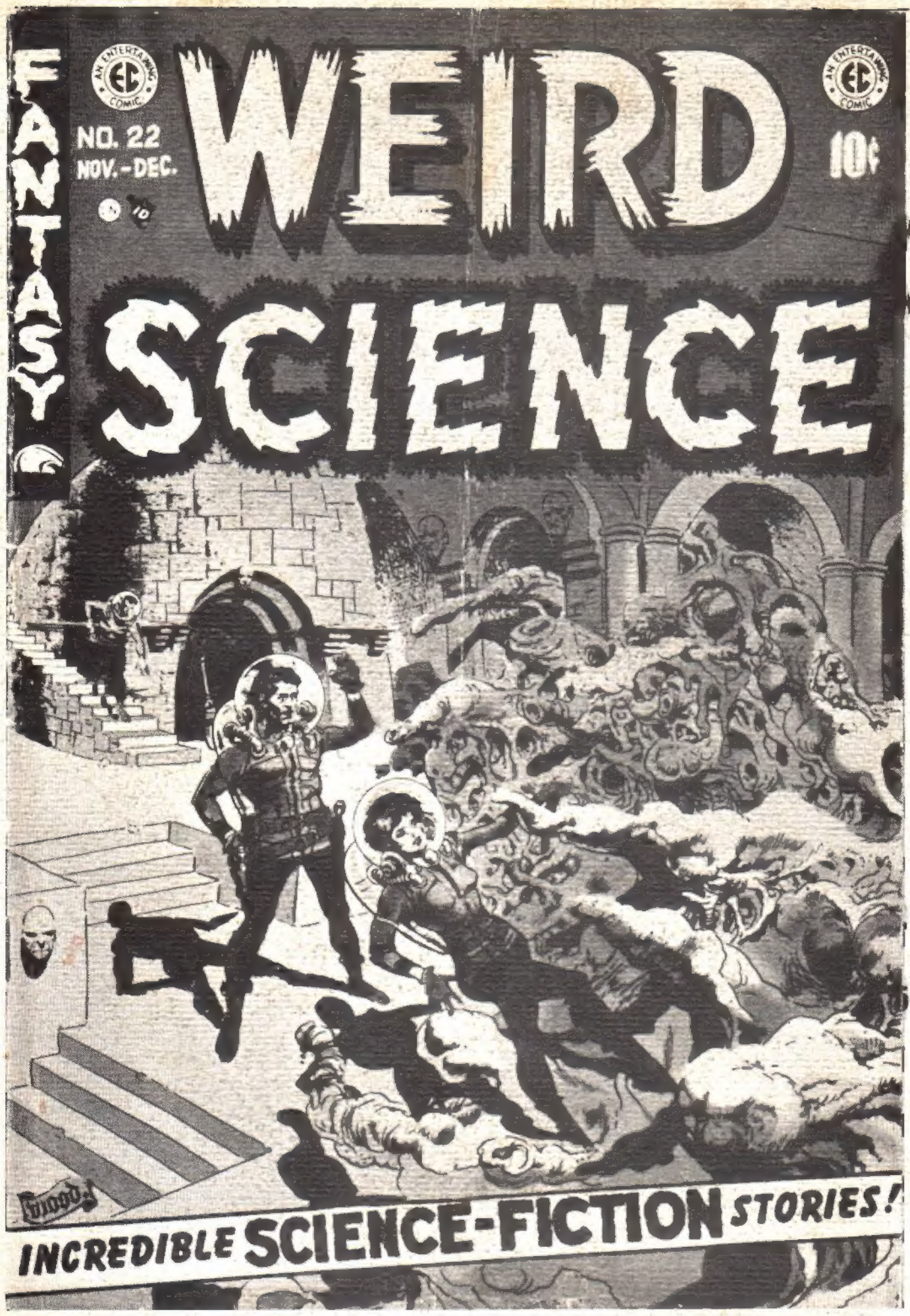
...OR TODAY...

...OR TOMORROW...

FOR MY WORLD IS THE WORLD OF SCIENCE-FICTION... CONCEIVED IN MY MIND AND PLACED UPON PAPER WITH PENCIL AND INK AND BRUSH AND SWEAT AND A GREAT DEAL OF LOVE FOR MY WORLD. FOR I AM A SCIENCE-FICTION ARTIST. MY NAME IS WOOD.



THE END


FANTASY
AN ENTERTAINING COMIC
NO. 22
NOV.-DEC.
10¢
WEIRD SCIENCE
AN ENTERTAINING COMIC
10¢
Wood
INCREDIBLE SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES!